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A Proposal for Teamwork in University Classes: Women, Economic Activity and Marriage in the Early Modern Period

María José Pérez Alvarez*

Universidad de León, Departamento de Historia (historia Moderna) Campus de Vegazana, s/n, 24071, León España

Abstract

From among the wide range of possible options that we could choose for this project, we have decided to focus on two issues that we consider to be fundamental: raising the visibility of women's economic contribution and the casuistry of the institution of marriage, to be explored through a variety of different sources. In and of themselves, these two aspects are sufficient to shed light on many questions about the life cycle of women who lived during the Old Regime.

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1. Introduction

The research conducted in recent years has emphasised the important role that women played in the economic dynamics of urban and rural life, although given the nature of the sources involved, faithful reflections that they are of a predominantly patriarchal society, this role remained obscured by the figure of the husband or father, representatives of the domestic unit with respect to the outside world.

For a woman, marriage was a crucial moment in her life. However, marriage did not simply constitute an emotional bond between two people, but rather, it was the very basis of social order; it was therefore necessary to exercise control of the sacrament on which so much responsibility rested. To this end, all sources of religious, family and political authority joined forces. The religious authorities used sin as a means to control consciences; the family made use of all the hereditary and socio-economic strategies that were at its disposal, not least of which was the appeal to honour and reputation; and, finally, the political authorities gave all of the above the necessary legal support. Therefore, there was no place in this society for those marriages which did not enjoy prior family consent or that were not duly recognised by the community.

Each and every one of the synods held throughout the Early Modern Period placed special emphasis on the marriage sacrament. At the beginning of the 16th century, the eradication of clandestine marriages and the promotion public

wedding ceremonies was a central concern. Attempts had long been made since earlier periods to combat the former custom, but judging by the bishops' repeated insistence on this point, their efforts to eliminate it had not been successful. Among other evils, the objections raised about clandestine marriages were that they enabled the couple concerned to circumvent family plans, that a given impediment could be ignored or that they could lead to bigamy.

2. Implementation of the project

History is one of the most important disciplines as regards raising awareness about the social inequalities that have been forged over the course of time. It provides an understanding of how these inequalities slowly became established and elucidates their key elements, all of which is extremely useful, if not for their complete eradication, at least so that they can be gradually corrected. To this end, we must take as our starting point a knowledge of the causes behind their emergence.

Using critical research as the basis, it is important for students to learn about the standards of behaviour established for women during the Old Regime, to understand how gender relations were forged and evolved, and to determine whether any initiatives were suggested by one source of authority or another that contributed to a re-evaluation or extension of their scope. By studying this aspect of history and conducting a detailed analysis of its causes and precedents, students will gain an insight into the origins of this pernicious cultural inheritance that continues to afflict women even today.

The project is implemented within the context a specific historical period that was dominated by a patriarchal society where men rather than women wielded authority and leadership, and which was marked by patterns of sexist and discriminatory behaviour that derived from these power relations. It was in these circumstances that male and female stereotypes emerged, and these were subsequently consolidated by means of moralistic, religious and legal treatises. These narratives endowed men with complete authority for decisions affecting the household, and allotted them responsibility for productive work. Meanwhile, women's social space was confined to the home, and their work to reproduction; furthermore, they were required to project an image of chastity, submission and obedience. However, the reality was different. Women made an invaluable contribution to the evolution of history, playing a leading role in economic development and the transmission of culture. Therefore, whilst the legal and moral dictates or the undeniable subordination of women prevailing at the time should not be disregarded, the notion of female "victimhood" must be overcome and women's role "as mobilising agents of history" reclaimed.

A) Rationale: Teaching quality can only be achieved through a constant process of recycling and updating that equips teachers to engage with the ever more demanding dynamics of learning. The work we present here focuses on the chronological period of Modern History. However, given the long historical trajectory of the sources employed, it also lends itself perfectly to covering and consolidating cross-curricular knowledge, as it could be extrapolated to other historical periods, whether earlier or later, and even to an interdisciplinary approach, in the quest to provide students with a comprehensive education on this subject. In sum, this project offers students great potential for teamwork and for playing a very active role in the construction of their historical knowledge, since they will acquire the skills necessary to obtain and critically assess information from historical sources, and will thus be better equipped to construct their own historical explanations.

Furthermore, the fifth specific competence indicated in the University of Leon History Degree Report says: "To develop attitudes of tolerance and respect for cultural diversity and different perspectives arising from historical or cultural traditions". Although this competence could encompass the history of women, there is nevertheless no specific course devoted to the subject; rather, attempts have been made to address women's history in some of the other courses, albeit as a completely secondary issue.

B) The overall objectives of the project presented here are twofold: firstly, to introduce students to the study of the role assigned to women in the Old Regime, in order to rescue women from the historical oblivion to which they have been consigned until quite recently; and secondly, to introduce students to the study of gender relations - especially those arising from the sacrament of marriage - through the use of original historical sources, in order to forge a link between the historical antecedents and current issues.

C) This initiative is aimed at students in the latter years of their degree, since participation in the project will require a certain degree of prior knowledge (political, economic and social contexts, how attitudes have changed and familiarity with reading historical sources), generally of the kind only accessible to students who have reached higher levels of the

educational process. Furthermore, this represents the ideal moment to introduce students to the skills necessary for research.

D) It is envisaged that the project will last for a full semester.

E) As regards the selection of materials that will be made available to students, which represent the means by which they will achieve the learning outcomes, based on the method of discovery, these will be of a very varied nature. The primary sources will include historical documents, which are easily accessible through the PARES platform (lawsuits, censuses and cadastral surveys), and treatises or literary works (manuals for confessors, synodical constitutions, moral, doctrinal and legal treatises, council ordinances). As for the secondary sources, which will help students learn how to carry out historical research using the above, there is today a substantial number of monographs covering each and every one of the issues related to the history of the women. Both primary and secondary materials are available in paper or digital format. The pertinence of this activity renders it of undoubted interest to future historians, since by encouraging students to become familiar with reading specialist historical sources, they will be endowed with an essential tool for carrying out future research and, of course, for acquiring skills, gathering knowledge and developing an intrinsic motivation for reading.

F) Learning outcomes: The specific objectives, which are the utilitarian incarnation of education, in other words the learning outcomes envisaged as a result of the activity. The objectives enumerated below cover a wide spectrum, including goals of both a personal and instrumental nature. Precision in wording, which should be concrete and specific, will contribute greatly to facilitating the teaching evaluation process.

- To consult historical sources which contain material related to the subject under study.
- To develop literature searching skills applied to bibliographic and documentary sources.
- To acquire the tools necessary to develop a scientific method of analysis that can be applied to studies related to other topics or other documentary sources.
- To acquire a broad knowledge of the scientific language and communication skills related to this field of study.
- To develop the ability to manage information: rigorous methodical and critical analysis, problem solving, ordering historical processes and the relationships between them, placing them in hierarchical order or making reasoned decisions when dissecting content.
- To learn how to work as part of a team and to share, integrate and synthesise knowledge.
- To understand the importance of updating and recycling the knowledge acquired in the work of the historian.
- To acquire the capacity for thoughtful reading comprehension, endowing students with the ability to interpret source materials, use critical reasoning, identify the purpose of the sources according to the intention of the institution from which they derive, formulate a synthesis and produce reasoned evaluations.
- To acquire an in-depth knowledge of the patterns of conduct assigned to men and women by societies in the Old Regime.
- To contextualise the models of behaviour proposed in the different sources within the attitudes and gender relations of the time.
- To understand the importance of reconstructing the past in order to learn about the roots of the cultural heritage that continues to impact on present-day society.
- To foment the equality of rights and opportunities between men and women, through identifying the inequalities on which societies in the past were based.

G) A teaching plan is the organised sequence of activities aimed at execution of the task and the construction of learning. We have divided this into three large stages, some of which are further subdivided into a number of phases.

-In the first stage, which corresponds to the receptive phase, the teacher's input is particularly important, since although he or she will be present throughout the entire project to answer students' questions or guide them, it is in this stage that he or she must establish the dynamics through a presentation of the subject, providing the fundamental knowledge

necessary to construct meaningful learning. Besides presenting the theoretical content and introducing the students to the basic tools required to conduct their research, it is during this stage that students will be furnished with the necessary motivation that will enable them, through an exploration of the sources and inductive methodology, to progress in their self-directed study. It will be of vital importance during this process to engage students in the design of their working plan. Only by taking their interests or expectations into consideration can we guarantee the creation of an atmosphere of motivation, and therefore, greater commitment to carrying out the task in hand. Thus, the list of related proposals, such as the specific research topics and documents, is not intended to be conclusive, and we remain open to the possibility that students may extend it according to their personal interests. These proposals include: the vision of women in moral literature, women in the domestic economy, women's participation in the market economy, the meaning of marriage, the legal system and women, and marriage and the family.

- The second stage, which encompasses the reflective, creative and retentive phases, consists of assigning each of the teams, composed of no more than three or four students, with a specific direct or indirect source for analysis in order for them to explore its possibilities, while remaining open to the possibility that they may find or become interested in different sources of a similar nature. This stage will inevitably involve a period of self-directed or individual study, devoted to the acquisition and understanding of the concepts involved, some of which will already have been covered in class whilst others will be encountered in the course of the students' work. In addition, it will be necessary to hold tutorials throughout this process. The first of these may be broader in scope, involving the participation of all the teams, since the initial difficulties that they will face are often very similar. In this case, although the discussion will be directed by the teacher, the exchange of ideas, the reasoned presentation of contrasting opinions and personal and group experiences of adopting solutions that enable them to overcome potential obstacles, are often very rewarding for the group. The remainder of the tutorials will be held with small groups or even with individuals. These are extremely important because they will involve two-way communication of information. They will provide students with the solutions to specific problems or concerns as these arise, and will give teachers the opportunity to assess each student's learning progress.

-In the third and final stage, the project will conclude with the communicative and practical phases, which will consist of the presentation of the results obtained by each of the teams. Here, students will discuss all the stages of their research, the solutions adopted with respect to any problems they may have encountered, and their conclusions. Once they have concluded their presentations, the floor will be opened to general debate moderated by the teacher, with the aim of identifying specific circumstances in women's present-day lives that can be linked to our historical heritage.

H) Assessment will be continuous, based on tutorial observations as well as individual and group participation in the final stages of the project.